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**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD  
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

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Property Address:	<b>4340 Nebraska Avenue, NW</b>	<b>X</b>	Agenda
Landmark/District:	<b>Immaculata Seminary</b>		Consent Calendar
		<b>X</b>	Concept Review
Meeting Date:	<b>October 27, 2011</b>	<b>X</b>	Alteration
H.P.A. Number:	<b>11-467</b>	<b>X</b>	New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	<b>Steve Callcott</b>		Demolition
			Subdivision

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SmithGroup Architects (David King and Tom Butcavage), representing American University's Washington School of Law, seeks concept review for renovation, alterations and new construction at the former Immaculata Seminary campus.

**Property Description**

The Immaculata Seminary was created on what was part of the early nineteenth-century Dunblane estate. In the early twentieth century, the Sisters of Providence of St. Mary of the Woods, a Catholic order, purchased the property to establish the Immaculata Seminary school for girls, and constructed an imposing school building (Capital Hall) facing Tenley Circle in 1904. The land between the new school and Dunblane was used as a recreational play area, with the former carriage drive retained as a walk and visual axis between the house and the school. During the 1920s, the school grew with the construction of a chapel and a dormitory wing to Capital Hall, and a garage and laundry building to Dunblane. In the mid 1950s, the campus was further enlarged by the construction of three buildings that surrounded the campus's lawn to form a central quad. A one-story addition was added to Dunblane in 1974. The complex served Immaculata from the school's opening in 1905 until it closed in 1986, when the property was sold to American University.

As detailed more fully in the HPO's evaluation of the nomination, the property is eligible for designation as an historic district. The Dunblane house (c. 1839), Capital Hall (1904, with a 1919 addition), the Chapel (1921), the site – the lawn in front of Capital Hall and the central quad with its axial relationship between these buildings -- are contributing to the character of the historic district. The 1950s buildings are non-contributing.

**Proposal**

The project will include renovation of the campus' flagship building, Capital Hall, for use as administrative offices, rehabilitation of the Chapel as a moot courtroom, demolition of the existing 1950s dorm and gymnasium buildings, and construction of approximately 240,000 square feet of additions to the rear and sides of Capital Hall along Nebraska Avenue and Yuma Street for classrooms, faculty offices, law clinics, a library, and student support spaces. Like the 1950s buildings, the new construction will be organized on the site to reinforce the central quadrangle and to retain the central axis formed by the

contributing historic buildings. The project will include significant site improvements, including regrading of the lawn in front of Capital Hall, tree retention and renewal of plantings in the central quad, and creation of a walk around the perimeter of the site with improved plantings. At this time, no specific treatment or use has been developed for Dunblane (1839) or the area immediately surrounding it at the western end of the property. The applicants' submission includes a more detailed description of the project.

### **Community Participation**

At the request of ANC 3E and Councilmember Cheh, the Office of Planning facilitated a series of community meetings over the summer with AU representatives and their design team to discuss and provide input on the development of the design. In addition to Office of Planning and HPO staff, ANC 3E invited members of the Tenley Campus Neighborhood Association and Ward 3 Vision; the Tenleytown Historical Society (the applicant for the designation) and other community representatives also participated.

The purpose of the meetings was to ensure an open dialogue between the many stakeholders and to arrive at an appropriate balance between a variety of planning, preservation and programmatic goals. At the first meeting, the group identified and generally agreed upon the principles that they were interested in seeing embodied in the project. The design principles and goals included: 1) Maximizing connectivity to transit and Metro; 2) Retaining and restoring Dunblane and Capital Hall; 3) Ensuring that the new construction was compatible with the historic buildings, campus and neighborhood; 4) Achieving the School of Law's program in a building that embodied excellence in design and sustainability; 5) Locating building density closest to Metro, Wisconsin Avenue and Nebraska Avenue while minimizing building presence on Yuma and the western end of the campus around Dunblane; 6) Achieving the proper balance between encouraging density and discouraging sprawl with retaining and enhancing the classic characteristics of a college campus; 7) Ensuring porosity – the ability for the public to see and move through the site; and 8) Achieving superior public spaces, including using the front lawn in front of Capital Hall for a more public use, minimizing impervious surfaces, and maximizing tree canopy.

### **Evaluation**

The concept proposal is the result of a process of redesign and refinement undertaken in response to the design principles and feedback gathered at the community meetings. The process has resulted in a project that is compatible with and enhances the historic character of the site, provides for the school's desired expansion, is respectful to the surrounding community, and substantively addresses the publicly-identified design goals.

When initially submitted to the Office of Planning, the proposal called for a large, single building in the center of the quad and no specific commitment that Dunblane would be retained. The new construction was out of scale with the site's historic buildings and the neighborhood, and ignored the organizing principles and landscape that give the site definition as a campus.

As redesigned, the project now retains the significant historic buildings on the site, sensitively adapts and reuses those buildings for new uses, retains and reinforces the central quadrangle as an open and accessible public space, preserves the majority of mature trees and the natural topography of the site, and results in significant improvements to the front lawn and perimeter of the site that will increase opportunities for public access and enjoyment. The new construction has been massed and broken down in scale to ensure compatibility with the historic buildings on the site, and to respect the scale of the abutting residential and institutional buildings, while also being concentrated at the eastern end of the site, closest to Metro and a respectful distance from Dunblane. While the precise design vocabulary, detailing and material palette of the additions is still being refined, that which has been developed exhibits variety and richness, appropriately presenting a more monumental scale at the public entrances to the campus on Wisconsin and Nebraska Avenues, and a smaller, more human sense of scale facing the residential neighborhood and within the quadrangle.

While the project does not address or propose a reuse for Dunblane, the applicants have agreed in principle to its retention and rehabilitation. The house has been subjected to a variety of alterations, additions and a major fire, but absent an identified program or use, the applicants have not yet undertaken an evaluation of the property or developed a proposed treatment. Conceptual plans for the building will be forwarded to the HPRB when developed.

The HPO recommends that the Board approve the conceptual design as consistent with the purposes of the preservation act.